

Drive Against Illiteracy

A drive against illiteracy in Northern Rhodesia has been launched by Mrs. H. Hay, a missionary.

With an entirely new method contained in one simple text book of pictures and words, her success has been rapid. Natives have been trained to read their own newspaper, "Mutende," and write a simple letter in seven weeks.

A few trained instructors give the first lesson, then the pupil is morally bound to give another Native the same lesson and so on.

Already many men, women and children have been trained at Nkana Mine, where the project was started, and the scheme is now being extended to Native kraals and outlying districts with considerable success.

The Northern Rhodesian Government is giving all possible support.

Mr. Wankar

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OUR ILLITERATE MILLIONS

70 - 80% of our population of 11,000,000 cannot read and write. At the lowest estimate 7,700,000 persons in South Africa cannot read the newspaper, cannot read a Government Notice, cannot read the alphabet. 7,700,000 cannot write the simplest letter to their friends or relations.

This estimate of illiteracy is from the report of the Adult Education Commission, which based its estimates upon two or three partial surveys of our Non-European population, - Indian, African and Coloured. From figures in the same report, it would appear that only about $\frac{1}{3}$ of our African children of

school-going age ever enter schools, and of that $\frac{1}{3}$ 85% leave school before

standard III. If standard III is taken as the stage at which a child become literate, then only 15% of African children become literate. But the position is worse than that. Educational psychologists assert that unless the arts of reading and writing are practised after the attainment of literacy, the just literate individuals lapse into illiteracy once more. In view of the opportunities offered to Africans to continue to practise, it is certain that considerably less than 15% of children who attend Native schools remain literate. So each year, to the existing mass of the illiterate and the ignorant, there is added a constant stream of illiterate Africans. In years to come there will be a great lee-way to make up.

And what is being done about it? In primary education the Cape Province has made provision for the eventual compulsory attendance of Coloured children and the Government has increased its provision for Native Education. It is now spending £3,400,000 on Native Education, this includes £860,000 on school-feeding for Native children. Indian schools are largely non-state aided. For adults in the cities there are a few night-schools run by voluntary agencies and in some cases financed by a municipality, or by the Union Education Department. But apart from these unco-ordinated efforts little has as yet been done to meet the need of our adult illiterate millions. The Government has appointed Dr. G.W. Eybers as Director of Adult Education and has allocated £5,000 per annum which together with sums available for continuation and other classes, must meet the needs of Europeans and Non-Europeans alike.

South Africa must be prepared to tackle the problem not only on grounds of humanity and justice, but in the common interests of the country. The Social and Economic Planning Council has said

"The Union is doomed to losing competitive struggle against the mentally-developed labour of the Western countries, against the awakening Eastern races and even against other parts of Africa unless the educational facilities for non-Europeans are improved."

The Industrial and Agricultural Requirements Commission stated

"The present restricted use of natives in manufacturing industry is, however, partly a result of the barriers placed in the way of their industrial employment. Taken in conjunction with the high wages of the resulting large proportion of civilised workers which industrialists have to engage, this has militated against the full development of the Union's industrial resources. If industry were more highly mechanised there is little doubt that wider and better use could be made of Native workers ... "

Dr. van Eck, Chairman of the Social and Economic Planning Council and head of the Industrial Development Corporation, has written that South Africa must rely less and less on the so called cheap labour of South Africa and that our goal must be to improve skill and earning power and therefore the buying power of South Africa's largely unskilled population. This cannot be done with an illiteracy incidence of 70 - 80%.

What is needed is a large scale campaign to wipe out illiteracy. Russia has practically done so, China is doing so, the South American Republics are tackling the problem. In Northern Rhodesia an experiment is in progress

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while the British Colonial Office has issued a white paper on mass education in its colonies. South Africa cannot lag behind.

Already in Johannesburg an experiment is going on in connection with the training of African Y.M.C.A. leaders for piece-time work. Mrs. Maida Whyte of the Institute of Race Relations is experimenting in the teaching of illiterate Africans to speak, to read and write English by methods based on the experience gained by information officers in the U.D.F.I., on the work of Dr. Frank Laubach and taking into account the Oxford English Readers for Africa; the A.B. Readers; and the New Method Readers. It is hoped that in this way it will be possible to provide the African with an economically useful language at once without the need of teaching him first his own vernacular before teaching him the elements of English, and it is hoped that he will be able to do this within a comparatively short period of time. Should the method prove successful, there will then be forged a weapon where with to wage a mass attack on literacy comparable to that done by Dr. Laubach in other countries, where his "each one teach one" method proved so successful. It is emphasised that the work being done is experimental but given the eagerness of the illiterate African to learn and the eagerness of the literate African to teach, it is hoped that the method will be evolved not only to short-circuit the formal method of instruction which the adult African finds so wearisome and so unrewarding but also to place in the hands of even illiterates a tool by means of which they can teach his fellow illiterates.

The Council of the Y.M.C.A. is financing the training of 16 leaders and the Bantu Welfare Trust has made a generous donation to make it possible to provide the experimental equipment. Should the method prove successful in the teaching of English, it is proposed to adapt it to the teaching of ~~English; it is proposed~~ Afrikaans and of the vernaculars. The Institute of Race Relations is already active in securing the help of suitable persons to draw up experimental courses in these other languages and as soon as the English experiment is complete then it is hoped to conduct similar ones in other languages. In January the Institute of Race Relations is calling a Conference to discuss with experts on Adult Education for Non-Europeans the production and distribution of literature, mass methods to liquidate illiteracy, vocational and technical education, physical education and leisure time activities.....

Q.W.

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